



# LISTEN

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH, OFFICE OF CONSUMER RELATIONS  
Bob Riley, Governor   John Houston, Commissioner   Volume 13, Number 4   Summer 2007

## Award Winner!

### Alabama Mental Health Advocate Sister Lucindia Claghorn wins Clifford W. Beers Award



Mental Health America awarded Lucindia Claghorn, of Mobile, Alabama, with its highest honor, the Clifford W. Beers Award, for her leadership and community service at the Closing Night Dinner of its Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. on June 9, 2007. Each year, Mental Health America presents the Beers Award to a mental health consumer who best reflects the example set by Mental Health America founder, Clifford W. Beers, in his efforts to improve conditions for and attitudes toward people living with mental illnesses.

"Lucindia Claghorn inspires countless individuals living with mental illnesses and other advocates

*continued on page 14*

## Facility Director Stewart Comments on Conference

I had the privilege of attending my first Consumer's Recovery Conference at Shocco Springs retreat center on May 1, 2, and 3. Approximately 900 consumers attended the three-day event. They came from all over Alabama, by the 12 passenger van load and by the Trailways bus load. Ably directed by Director of Consumer Relations Mike Autrey and his staff, the conference was a tremendous success. Other Mental Health Department staff members including Central Office staff and Facility Directors were there to assist in serving meals and to help in any possible way. Doctors and nursing staff from system facilities assisted with medical evaluation and care. This presented a rare opportunity for service to our consumers that was deeply gratifying.

Service to others can be a humbling experience, and this was indeed an extraordinary opportunity to serve. Over and over again, the gratitude expressed by the consumers was simply overwhelming. These are people who have often known pain and rejection in the world. At Shocco Springs, there is no need to explain anything or to fear the rejection of the world.

The consumers are remarkably compassionate and loving toward each other. They laughed and cheered at every opportunity, from the talent show to the inspirational talks by Alabama Secretary



of State Beth Chapman, and by Martha Hawkins, a consumer in recovery who owns the remarkably successful local restaurant, Martha's Place. Martha urged the consumers to never give up and to always follow their dreams.

The last night there was a candlelight vigil in which all of the consumers made a huge circle. They were told to envision their candle as all of the hurts that they had received or caused in their lives. Then, a group at a time, they solemnly, quietly walked to the center and dropped their candles into a barrel, where they could simply burn out. It was a very moving spectacle to see.

Near the end of the conference one lady told me, "This is just Heaven up here. I am already looking forward to next year."

So am I, ma'am.

*Allen Stewart is the Director of Greil Hospital in Montgomery.*



# Recovery Conference consumers provide input to central office



Something new at this year's conference was a booth staffed by the ADMH's grants and community outreach coordinator Shannon Weston-Byrd. The purpose of the booth was to gather consumer input regarding the current mental health delivery system as well as suggestions for improvement.

"We want consumers to be the drivers," Byrd said. "We don't want 'consumer-driven' to be just an empty phrase. Getting input at a

grassroots level helps us be more aware."

The Department's efforts to move local planning to different regions of the state – where consumers know their particular needs best – was partly behind the idea of setting up the booth at Shocco.

"It all starts with a solid needs assessment," Byrd said. "We know this is a 'self-selective' snapshot. We are seeing here the folks who are motivated to come to Shocco Springs, and then have the initiative to get involved

with this. But it still provides a lot of open, honest input."

Byrd said more than 50 people came through in the first half-day.

"Overall we are hearing good things," she said. "We're getting a lot of positive feedback on the therapies available in the communities. Many, however, are not really aware of their own treatment plan, and don't know much about the advocacy services available to them. And of course, many consumers feel that day treatment is not what it should be."

"The most positive message we are getting is that every single person involved in a drop-in center says it is the best thing they have going. Drop-in centers are calm and reassuring. There is no tension. This is not always the case with day treatment according to those we are interviewing here at Shocco. And really it's not just drop-in centers per se. It is anything that is peer related."

Byrd has her heart in her job through her own experiences.

"My mother has schizophrenia, so I have been in and out of all that as a family member my whole life. My experiences in that regard are what motivated me to get my masters in counseling and try to help others. I think this is one way we can do that."

## RESPECT Award Winners 2007



Deborah Adams	Norris Laurence
Yvonne Ambrose	Dawn Marren
Susan Beck	William McWeeny
Barberous Benderson	Steve Pendergrass
Dianne Durbin	Linda Pierce
Lori Ellard	Penny Reynolds
Alica Fossett	Kathleen Roye
Laura Fulbright	Motoko Saito
Curtis Golightly	Fairley Schreiber CSW
Eric Goodwin	Stephanie Thompson
Yvonne Jones	Bernita Vinson
Mary Lord	
Dr. Edward Love	



## ROY CHISAM WINS STATE BOWLING TITLE



Consumers across Alabama know twins Roy and Troy Chisam for their outgoing, friendly nature and their spirited singing duets at the annual Recovery Conference. Bowlers from across Alabama got to know them when they visited Montgomery for the United States Bowling Congress State Championships.

"Roy was bowling really well, but his ball was not carrying," said brother Troy. "He asked our dad what he could do differently. He got some good advice and went on to

roll 12 strikes in a row. It's a lot of pressure in a big event like that, knowing you're coming up on something special and having all those people watching."

How did Roy feel when he was coming up on his perfect game?

"I felt like I was in the zone," he said. "The first time I rolled a perfect game I was kind of manic.

But a friend taught me how to be more calm and be a better bowler. It worked for me that day. It is one thing to roll a perfect game, and another to do it at the USBC state championships. It all just came together for me there."

"When Roy did it I cried," Troy said. "I couldn't help it. I was just so proud. It was a great moment for us both."

The whole Alabama consumer movement congratulates the twins on their accomplishments, but mostly just for being the great people they are. Keep on rolling!

## Health Screening again serves capacity crowd

A popular and potentially life-saving feature of the Recovery Conference is the health screening available to those who sign up in advance. Directed by Dr. Carter English, a pharmacist with the ADMH, the screening provides clients with their blood pressure, cholesterol, a blood sugar screening, and height and weight.

"We take these readings and get a brief medical history from each participant," said English. "We ask them their diagnosis and what medications they are on. Once we get the lab results we sit down with the individuals and help them interpret the information. For example, if they have high blood sugar we explain how this can lead to diabetes and what they can do to prevent or control the condition. I think it's a pretty useful exercise that people seem to appreciate."

The service is underwritten by Pfizer Pharmaceuticals.

One of the people who have benefitted from the screening is Jan McCurdy.

"I had my mental illness diagnosis 30 years ago, but have not been back to that



doctor and have been working on getting better in every part of my life. And lately I've been getting some good recognition for it," McCurdy said.

"For starters, I have gone from 220 pounds to my current 184. I cut back on fried foods and meat and eat a lot more vegetables. I listened to the Plenary Session (Dr. Benjamin Druss) about your overall physical health being related to your mental health and I believe that. I'm working on both, and believe that God put a new spirit in me to let me do all of this. Plus, these people at the health screening are good people who help you feel at ease. They're a nice bunch of folks just trying to help people."

## Captionist 'evolves in her work' thanks to conference

Tasha M. Scott, president and owner of Caption It, has evolved in her work since she first began providing the captioning for deaf conferees at the Annual Recovery Conference three years ago.

"I went to court reporting school and was mostly doing depositions," she said. "But that changed when I got the opportunity to come here three years ago. And I have been here every year since then. Since starting here I have been doing more and more captioning for students at universities around the state. I find this much more rewarding than depositions."

It was a change in other ways as well.

"I had never been involved in the deaf community before," she said. "But now I feel like a part of that community, and feel like I am doing much more meaningful work."



# Recovery Conference

## *brings out fun, music ...*

The Talent Show is one of the longest-running traditions in the history of the annual Recovery Conference. It is also one of the longest-running events at the conference! In spite of a 7:00 p.m. start, the Talent Show typically runs on till midnight or even later, followed up by a late-night guitar jam session led by Jay Maguire.

David Robinson began the evening by reading from his work-in-progress, a romance novel set in 9th century Ireland. The twins Roy and Troy Chisam, whose Gospel duets are as much a part of conference tradition as anything, then led the group in "Amazing Grace," a song that came around a few times during the night. In fact, harmonica wizard

Margaret Arbogast blew that old number in the next act, along with "Coat of Many Colors" and "Oh Susannah." She then blew out one more great tune "just to show you that us white folks have rhythm!"

David Dupree showed his excellent voice in "I Been Waiting," with the duet of Julie Sumner and Robbie Nelson following up

*This year's show was a bit different in that several people thus leading to a mere three or four hours of entertainment talent level, as many aspiring musicians, writers, singers,*





# Talent Show

*. and puppets!*

with "You Had A Bad Day." Juanice Romero then sang "No Turning Back," before Mary McKerley came on to sing an old country favorite, "The Great Speckled Bird." She sounded for all the world like Mother Maybelle Carter!

More music followed as Betty Haynes sang "It's A Blessing To Be Alive." Helen

Bishop rocked the lively crowd with "The Night The Lights Went Out in Georgia," announcing that the song was "originally re-done by Reba McEntire." Agetha Dotson then ably performed without her duet partner in singing "I'll Fly Away."

Kerry Saulters every year sings some sort of show tune or soundtrack number, but this

year announced that we were finally going to hear her do country. Her song, "(When You're Broken) Don't Stop Believing In Yourself," really brought out all her fans and lots of applause.

Alberta Pennington returned the crowd to the Gospel mood with "Walk With Me." This was a show stopper that brought down

*people were out of the room when their names were called, comment. But fewer performers by no means lessened the singers and actors graced the stage.*





ANOTHER YEAR, ANOTHER TALENT SHOW. IT WAS GOOD AS ALWAYS, REMINDING THOSE IN ATTENDANCE



the house. Acquenetta Coley gave us back-to-back soul/Gospel with "His Eye Is On The Sparrow."

Judy Sartin changed the pace when she told the religious-themed story of Johnny's fence. It was also the first time in her years at Shocco that Sartin was able to climb on stage by herself without her wheelchair. She got lots of love from the crowd and announced that "if Heaven is a lot like Shocco, I want to go tonight!"

Danny Flemming sang a short sweet verse before George Higginbotham strummed a long ballad on his guitar, as he does every year. Jeremy Ward told those gathered

about the progress he has made this year, and then sang the song he sings with his mother in church, "Down On My Knees I Cried 'Holy!'"

Marie Frazier treated the group to Amy Grant's "Her Father's Eyes," and Marilyn Jo Weaver read a poem from her recently published book "A Fantasy." The selection featured rhymed couplets about God's grace and the support of her mental health center.

Corey Holmes lightened up the mood with several jokes. "What do you call a bowler on crack? A high roller! Does a horse dream of his mate? Yes, she's a nightmare! What kind

of test does an angry law student take? A cross examination! What kind of friend is a bingo player? B9!" Holmes got the most laughs of the evening with these and several other jokes.

David Johnson next sang some Gospel rap with real skill and intensity, and Louie F. Grase sang a more traditional Gospel number. Annice Emory continued the Gospel strain before Dorothy Anthony sang "You Are My Sunshine," an old classic first penned by Louisiana Governor Jimmie Davis.

Sherri Robinson, a Mobile-based poet, sang "Swing It" and "Consider Me" with very nice rhythm and rhyme. Willie Barnes, wearing







CE THAT TALENT ABOUNDS AT THE SHOCCO SPRINGS RECOVERY CONFERENCE. SEE YOU THERE NEXT YEAR!



his matched plaid outfit, was moving in a groove, leading up to Jackie Davis singing "I Love You." Ronald Coleman blew the room away with his classical piano playing, reminding everyone that this Talent Show is about talent! Jackie Deal added some Gospel verse before Frances Lundquist put on the first-ever puppet theater that the Talent Show has witnessed in all these years. Called "Who's in The House?" the puppet show was a true delight.

David Giudice changed the tempo with his guitar playing before Cedrick Hollins brought out his large voice to sing "I'll Just Wave My Hand."

Eugene Smith recited his original poem "A Love Never Lost" and Steve Bell sang "Almighty God We Serve." Shane H. then encouraged the crowd to follow their passions before he sat down and played a moody and accomplished piano solo.

Agnes Rouse recited her original verse composition "Daddy's Love" Jackie Benford's poem "My Love Has Turned To Blue" was next, and first-time conference-goer Lisa Cooper from Cullman sang "Your Blessing's On Me."

Steve Pendergrass, a support group leader and conference regular, sang and played his own song "I Can't Believe." The song was

a heartbreaker about a break-up, and those still left in the Chapel at 10 p.m. showed a lot of love to the RESPECT Award winner by making a lot of noise.

Amanda Lewis helped wind down the evening with her a capella song "Touched By Those Hands," dedicated to Judy Sartin.

Peggy Roberts closed out the night with "God Bless America" and a poem about the first-ever Christmas night.

Another year, another talent show. It was good as always, reminding those in attendance that talent abounds at the Shocco Springs Recovery Conference. See you there next year!

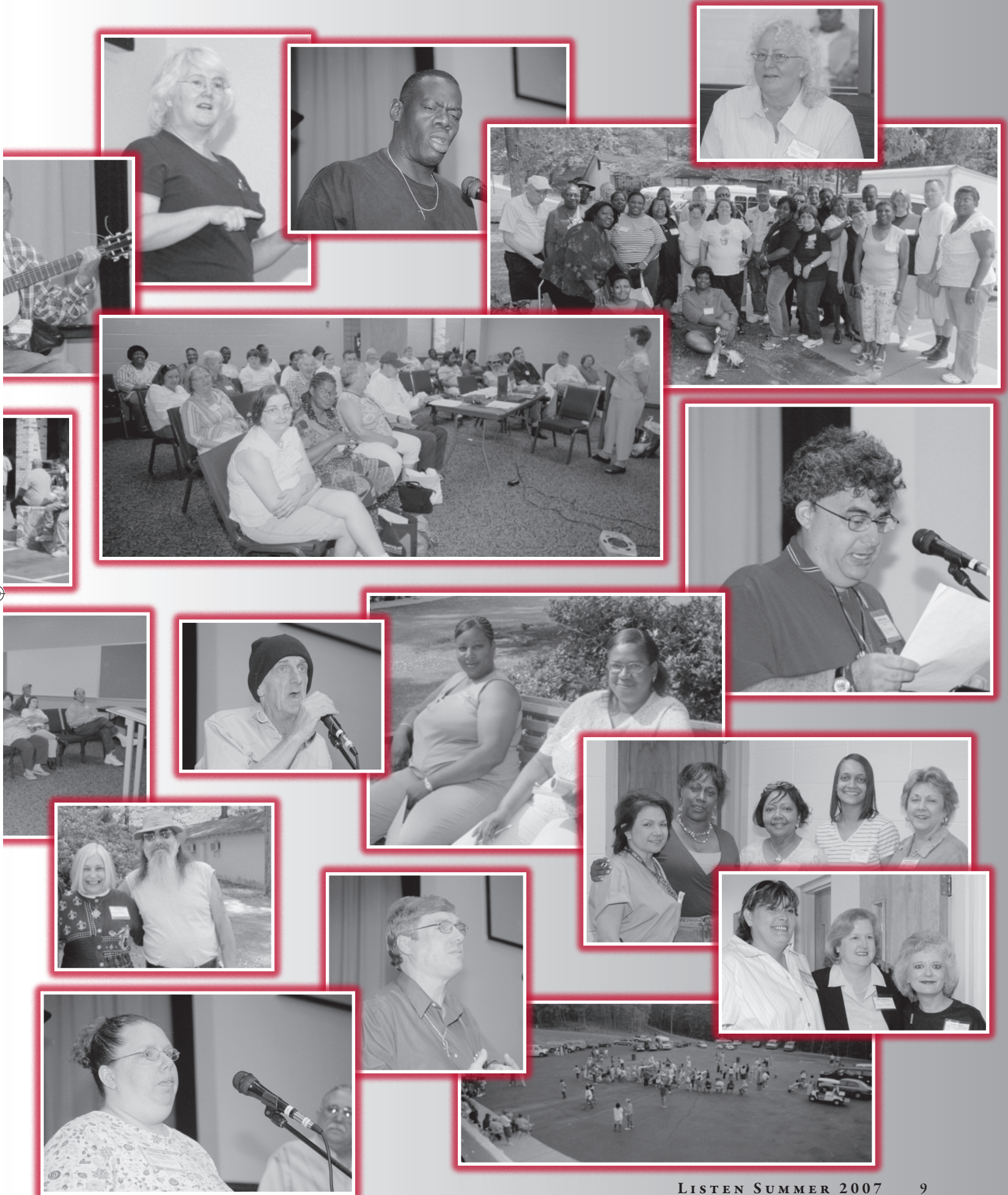




# RECOVERY CONFERENCE 2007

















# Support Groups & Consumer Advocacy Organizations

## Statewide

### Office of Consumer Relations

Alabama Department of Mental Health  
RSA Union Bldg • 100 N. Union Street  
P.O. Box 301410 • Montgomery, AL 36130-1410  
(334) 242-3456 • 1-800-832-0952  
michael.autrey@mh.alabama.gov

### Alabama Directions Council

c/o Office of Consumer Relations  
P.O. Box 301410 • Montgomery, AL 36130-1410  
(334) 242-3456 • 1-800-832-0952

### The Visionary Guild for Mentally Ill Artists

For information contact the Office of Consumer Relations  
at (334) 242-3456 or 800-832-0952

### Alabama Minority Consumer Council (AMCC)

Fannie Hicks, President  
P.O. Box 13, Midway, AL 36053, (334) 262-0363

### WINGS Across Alabama

PO Box 211286 • Montgomery AL 36124  
Call us toll-free at 888 WINGS AL  
(334) 395-7616 • fax (334) 395-7618  
www.wingsalabama.org

## Local

### ANNISTON

#### Emotions Anonymous

c/o Roy Chisam • 1130 Christine Ave., Anniston, AL 36207  
Meets Monday through Thursday, 9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.  
• Calhoun-Cleburne MHC • (256) 237-3796

### BIRMINGHAM AREA

#### The Sharing Group of Birmingham / So. Highland

c/o Jesse Stinson • 1241 51st Street South, Birmingham, AL 35222  
(205) 592-9773 • (fax) 592-9774

Meets Every Sunday, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

South Highland Presbyterian • 2035 Highland Avenue

#### The Sharing Group / Hill Crest

Meets Every Friday, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Hill Crest Hospital • 6869 5th Avenue S.

#### The Sharing Group / Wednesday

Meets Every Wed, 2:00-4:00 p.m. So Highland Presbyterian

#### The Sunday Club

Meets Every Sunday, 2:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

South Highland Presbyterian • 2035 Highland Avenue

### NEW Beginnings 12 Step Recovery

Bipolar and Depression Support Group

Facilitator, Shane Umlauf

Meets 1st and 3rd Fridays, at Independent Living Resources

206 13th Street South, Birmingham

Call Shane for more information, (205) 903-9792 or visit web site

<http://devoted.to/recovery>

### Recovery, Inc.

Meets every Saturday at 2:00 p.m. • Southside Library, 11th Ave

• Five Points So. For more information, contact Judy at (205) 918-0746

### Recovery Group of Alabama

(formerly Calera Consumer Group)

Meets Wednesdays at the Horsley Home on Highway 31 S. Calera,

Alabama • For more information call 205 668-0940

### Free Spirit

Meets Wednesdays, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon • UAB West (Board

Room) • 985 9th Avenue SW • Bessemer, AL • For more info

contact George Cook at (205) 481-7645

### CULLMAN

#### R.E.S.T.T.

Nancy Jester, President • Meets the third Friday of each month

1521 McNabb, Cullman • For more information, call Nancy

at (256) 347-4008

### Wallace Support Group

Roberta Armstrong, President • Meets 2nd & 4th Thursday

evenings, 6:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. • Wallace State Community College

• 801 Main Street NW, Hanceville, AL • Tom Beville Building

(Room 608) For more info call Roberta (256) 734-8169

### EAST-CENTRAL ALABAMA

#### Revelations Of Self No. 2

Kathleen Roye, President • (334) 741-0228 Meets last Friday of each

month at 6:30 - 8:00 p.m., Frank Brown Rec Center, 235 Opelika

Road in Auburn

### HUNTSVILLE

#### DBSA Huntsville

Dave Hepler, President • Meets Thursdays, 6:00 p.m. United Way

Building, 701 Andrew Jackson Way, Huntsville

For further information call (256) 539-1411

#### MHCA in Huntsville

c/o Helen Bishop, President • (256) 585-9772

Meets 1st Monday of each month, 2:00 - 3:30 at Our Place Drop-in

Center, 205 Max Luther Drive, Huntsville



### Soul Survivors

c/o Yvonne Jones, President • Meets 2nd Fridays, 6:00 p.m. • Angela Meadows Apartments Community Center • Albertville • For more information, call (256) 891-9883

### Angels Outreach

c/o Ann Jenkins, President

Meets 3rd Thursday of each month, 11:00 a.m.

Boaz, Alabama

For further information, call Ann (256) 593-2374

### MOBILE AREA

#### Schizophrenics Anonymous

Meets 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of each month at Government Street United Methodist Church in Mobile

For further information call (251) 438-5928

### MONTGOMERY/SELMA

#### Cahaba Regional Consumer Affairs Committee

Lee Maxwell, President • 1400 McArthur Street • Selma, AL 36701

• (334) 875-9911 • Meets 2nd Tuesdays & 4th Thursdays, 7p.m.

• 302 Franklin Street, Selma (Cahaba Center) • For further information call (334) 875-9911 • or call the Clubhouse at (334) 418-6525, 1:00-6:00 p.m. (Monday- Friday).

[www.cahabaconsumeraffairs.com](http://www.cahabaconsumeraffairs.com)

#### Postpartum Support Group

Greta Chambliss, President • Meets 1st Tuesday of each month, 6:30 - 7:30 p.m. • Frazier United Methodist Church, Montgomery

For further information, contact Greta at 260-9381, or e-mail at [alppdsupport@juno.com](mailto:alppdsupport@juno.com)

#### DBSA Montgomery

Meets 3rd Saturday of each month, noon - 2:00 p.m.

Montgomery Public Library • For more information contact Clairepatrese Sams Milligan at (334) 230-9870

Tuesday night group • Meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month • 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. • Office of Dottie D. Skipper, LPC • 1609 West Street, Montgomery

#### Orrville Cahaba Outreach Center

c/o Myrna Dukes • 213 Furniss St. • Selma, AL 36701

For more information call Myrna at (334) 874-7124

#### Montgomery Area Consumer Council

Daniel Pitts, President • (334) 294-7741 • Meets second Thursday each month, 4:30 pm at the WINGS Across Alabama Office, 400 Eastern Blvd., Suite 201, Montgomery

### NORTH WEST ALABAMA

#### Consumer Outreach

c/o Steve Pendergrass • Meets 2nd Thursday of each month, at Athens-Limestone Counseling Center, 1307 E. Elm Street, Athens, AL • For more information, call Steve at (256) 771-1613

#### Shoals Sharing Group

James Austin, President • (256) 383-9218

Meets 1st & 3rd Sundays (except holidays) from 2:00-3:30 p.m. at North Wood United Methodist Church, Florence, AL

#### DBSA of Morgan County

c/o Sue Brantley, MHA in Morgan County, PO Box 1502 Decatur, AL 35602, (256) 353-1160. Meets 2nd and 4th Thursdays 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. at the MHA Office • 207 Commerce Circle, SW, Decatur

#### The Serenity Group

Liz Volonino, President • Meets 3rd Wednesdays, 10:00 - 12 noon •

Mental Health Center • 4110 Highway 31 South, Decatur, AL

For more info contact Liz at (256) 355-5548

#### Hogohegee Consumer Wellness Center

Doris Smith, President • 1050 County Road 67, Dept 50, Moulton, AL 35650 • Meets 1st Saturday of each month, 2:00 p.m.

• For more information call (256) 566-3315 or 355-1955

### TUSCALOOSA/WEST ALABAMA

#### The Moodies (Tuscaloosa Chapter of DBSA)

Anne Lynch, President

Meets 2nd Thursday of each month at Friendship House 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. • 505 19th Avenue in Tuscaloosa [www.moodies.org](http://www.moodies.org)

For further information call Anne at (205) 345-4561 or harley at (205) 439-0076

#### Friendship House

c/o Lyn Mizerany

(205) 345-1534 • 505 19th Avenue

Tuscaloosa, AL 35401 Hours of operation

are Monday through Thursday, 8:30 a.m. - 2:45 p.m.

Emotions Anonymous Group meets

Mon. - Thurs., 9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

#### Support for Recovery

Meets 2nd Sunday of each month, 4:00 p.m. For meeting location contact Pamela at (205) 292-5438



Want to start a  
**SUPPORT**  
Group?

CALL 1.800.832.0952





*"Claghorn's remarkable life illuminates the powerful possibilities that reside in each person, regardless of disability or stigma. Her unyielding dedication and caring nature truly emulate the extraordinary life of Clifford Beers."*

through her tireless service to others," said David Shern, Ph.D., president and CEO, Mental Health America. "Claghorn's remarkable life illuminates the powerful possibilities that reside in each person, regardless of disability or stigma. Her unyielding dedication and caring nature truly emulate the extraordinary life of Clifford Beers."

Along with a close-knit, supportive network of friends and health care providers, Claghorn has worked to establish a life of

The Clifford W. Beers Award is named for the founder of Mental Health America and America's volunteer mental health advocacy movement. Created in 1976, the Beers award is presented annually to a consumer of mental health or substance abuse services who best reflects the example set by Beers in his efforts to improve conditions for, and attitudes toward, people with mental illnesses.

Claghorn is familiar to LISTEN readers. When she was diagnosed with schizophrenia,

"When helping people with their problems you find solutions to your own," she said. "The path to recovery for me is very simple: reach outside yourself."

In addition to all her other support group and advocacy work, Claghorn regularly teaches a sensitivity class at the Mobile MHC and twice a semester addresses the Nursing School at her alma mater.

"I tell them what it is like to have schizophrenia," she said. "At first the students seem a little afraid of me and aren't sure what to make of my sense of humor. But I've had a rich life and I like to share it."

Claghorn does indeed have a sense of humor. She was recently being photographed in Mobile's Cathedral Square. She knew all the passersby by name, asking particular questions about each one's health and well-being. Wearing her nun's habit, she suddenly looked up at the photographer and said: "You'd better make me look good! You know who my husband is!"

Congratulations Sister Lucindia. Alabama is proud of you.

*"You'd better make me look good! You know who my husband is!"*

advocacy, openness and empowerment for individuals with mental illnesses. Claghorn's many accomplishments include winning the Eli Lilly Foundation's Annual Reintegration Mentoring Award for her 30 years of volunteer advocacy and work for the mental health movement. She is the founding member and first president of the Mobile Mental Health Consumer Council, a Mental Health America of Southern Alabama spokesperson, RESPECT Award winner, a skilled linguist and, most recently, a published author. Claghorn has also served for 28 years as a dedicated American Red Cross volunteer.

her family abandoned her in Mobile when she was just 11 years old. She said she found "a new family" in the staff of the Mobile Mental Health Center. She overcame severe depression, hallucinations and delusional thinking to become a leader and advocate, graduating from the University of South Alabama in just three years. She became a nun in a secular Franciscan order, and devotes her energies toward a mental health ministry in and around the Mobile area.

Her path toward recovery led her to reach out to others.



# Cahaba Group Brings 60 Members to Shocco



*Leaders and members of the Cahaba Regional Consumer Affairs Committee always provide a strong presence at the Recovery Conference and this year was no exception. More than 60 of them arrived from Selma at Shocco on a Trailways bus, some of them for the first time. A highlight for the dynamic group this year is an art show featuring members' work at the Selma Art Guild.*

## Health, Wellness and Recovery: A Vision for Alabama Consumers

At a mid-week Plenary Session at this year's Annual Recovery Conference, Dr. Benjamin Druss of Emory University discussed the close relation between general wellness and mental health.

"Persons treated in the public mental health system die as much as 25 years earlier than persons in the general population, mostly due to medical causes such as cardiovascular diseases," he said. "This is a crisis we must address. We must understand that physical health and wellness are integral parts of recovery."

Dr. Druss emphasized over and over again that common medical problems afflict those in the mental health community at much higher rates, and that these ailments are typically more acute for those with mental illness. He mentioned such things as heart and lung disease, obesity and diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol. In most cases these potentially deadly conditions can be

avoided and controlled through common sense, discipline, and healthy behavior.

The key factors leading to these ailments are poor diet, lack of exercise, and smoking.

"Persons with mental illness smoke up to 44 percent of the cigarettes in the United States," he said. "Up to 90 percent of people with schizophrenia smoke. This is easily preventable. Quit smoking now and your health will improve!"

He mentioned that there are many reasons that persons with mental illness have poorer health than the general population. These include side effects of antipsychotic medications, stigma in the general health system, and the unnecessary but damaging separation between the general medical and the mental health systems.

Regardless of causes, Dr. Druss said it is up to us – as individuals and in peer support – to take simple, sensible steps to achieve wellness. Namely, improve your diet, get more exercise,

and stop smoking. As was the theme of the conference, Dr. Druss told consumers that these small steps could make a big difference in consumer's overall health.

At this point in the presentation, several consumers "testified" to the things they had done to improve their own health and well-being, plus told some tales about how they had been marginalized by doctors as a result of their mental illness.

Joel Slack concluded Dr. Druss's presentation by saying that we have enough problems without adding avoidable health problems into the mix.

"You are my family," Slack said. "Let this be a wake up call to all of us. Don't blame others if you aren't taking care of yourself! We are all struggling together to get our mental health back – working on recovery. We don't want to lose someone because of general health reasons. Let's work on this together and get better!"



# ALABAMA CONSUMER-RUN DROP-IN CENTER LOCATIONS

## FRIENDSHIP HOUSE

505 19th Avenue  
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401  
(205) 345-1534  
Open Monday - Thursday,  
8:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

## THE 1920 CLUB

1920 10th Avenue South  
Birmingham, AL 35205  
Open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday  
& Friday, 10:00 - 3:00 p.m.  
Open Wednesday 2:00 - 7:00 p.m.  
Call (205) 933-6955

## CAHABA DROP-IN CENTER

302 Franklin Street  
Selma, AL  
Open 1:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. daily  
(334) 418-6525 (Clubhouse number)  
If no answer, call (334) 875-1850

## SO-MI CENTER

4351 Midmost Drive  
Mobile, AL 36609  
(251) 342-0261  
Open Monday - Friday,  
7:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

## OUR PLACE (HAS MOVED)

205 Max Luther Drive,  
Huntsville, AL  
Open Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays  
from 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.  
Open Thursdays from 10:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.  
For more information call (256) 746-4145



*To find out more about how to start a drop-in center in your area, call the Office of Consumer Relations at 1 (800) 832-0952.*



Alabama Department of Mental Health  
Office of Consumer Relations  
RSA Union • 100 N. Union Street  
P.O. Box 301410  
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-1410

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Permit #109